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AUTHOR Faddis, Constance R.
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ABSTRACT

This booklet for dropout prevention program coordinators is part of a series of program materials for a school-based intervention process to help at-risk students stay in school. An introduction lists the qualities a good program coordinator must have or will need to develop as well as the specific tasks a program coordinator must do to make the helping process work at his/her school. The remainder of the booklet offers suggestions for ways to perform these tasks efficiently and effectively. These creative ways to carry out the program coordinator role are discussed: tailor the model program to the school, publicize the program in school and community, select participating faculty and staff, provide inservice on the helping process, organize and modify school programs and courses, set up and maintain open lines of communication, conduct or supervise student intake, select students' helping process team members, facilitate helping process teams' first meetings, coordinate the use of in-school program volunteers, oversee the general program effort in school, serve as liaison with program administration, supervise or conduct recordkeeping, collect and use formative evaluation data, collect summative data, and do whatever is necessary to make it all work. (YLB)

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DROPOUT PREVENTION SERIES

The Helping Process Booklet for Program Coordinators

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Program Information Office
National Center for Research
in Vocational Education
The Ohio State University
1960 Kenny Road
Columbus, Ohio 43210

Telephone (614) 486-3655 or (800) 848-4815

THE HELPING PROCESS BOOKLET FOR PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Constance R. Faddis
Sandra G. Pritz, Project Director

SP700HP03

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INTRODUCTION

NOTE TO PROGRAM COORDINATORS: Before you read this booklet, please be sure you have already read *The Helping Process Overview Guidebook*. The guidebook contains important information about the helping process that you will need to make the most of this booklet for yourself, your co-workers, and your at-risk students.

Working as a Helping Process Program Coordinator

Every person who participates in the helping process to assist a young person to stay and succeed in school has crucial roles to fill. But you, as the program coordinator, have a pivotal role upon which all of the others depend, because **you are the person who makes the dropout prevention program work in your school.**

You are the chief implementer, motivater, communicator, mediator, and all-around facilitator for all of the efforts needed for the success of the program. Though your responsibilities are many, so are the rewards: not only will you enjoy the personal satisfaction of helping the at-risk students in your school, you will also enrich your professional and personal life through close contacts and working relationships with a great range of professionals and volunteers both inside and external to the school.

Chances are that, if you aren't the initiator of the dropout prevention program, yourself, you've been appointed as the program coordinator by the administrator(s) of your school or school system. You have been chosen because the administrator(s)believes you can handle this important responsibility; you have good, close working relations with the faculty and staff in your school; and you are in touch with the realities affecting dropout-prone students.

As program coordinator, you have the authority and responsibility for the program at your school site. The administrator should give you relative autonomy to deal with program problems as they arise (that is, you should deal with problems in cooperation with other involved faculty and staff at the school, but have a large degree of autonomy from the rest of the school system).

To do a good job as a program coordinator, you will need to be able to call upon or develop the following qualities:

- Excellent "people skills"
- A commitment to helping young people overcome barriers to success
- Good organizational skills without a dependency on being bureaucratic
- The ability to mediate
- Knowledge of or willingness to learn about all collaborating external organizations and agencies
- Data collection and analysis abilities
- A willingness to "go the extra mile"

Here are the specific **tasks a program coordinator must do** to make the helping process work at your school:

- Tailor the program model and practices to your particular school setting.
- Publicize the program in the school and community to generate enthusiasm and commitment among interested faculty and staff, students, and local citizens.
- Select (or recommend) school faculty and staff to participate in the helping process.

- Provide information and inservice on the helping process to all involved adults (including volunteers and parents).

- Organize or reorganize courses and other education-related resources, with the participation of affected faculty and staff.

- Set up and maintain open lines of communication with all involved parties, both inside and external to the school.

- Conduct or supervise student intake assessments for the program and select students for participation according to established criteria.

- Identify initial helping process team members for each student.

- Facilitate the first meeting of each helping process team and charge it with developing the student's Individual Helping Plan (IHP).

- Coordinate the use of in-school program volunteers, including tutors.

- Offer suggestions of referral services both within and outside the school as the need is identified by any of the team members on behalf of a student.

- Oversee the general program effort in the school, encouraging creativity and dealing participatively with internal problems.

- Serve as site liaison with the program administrator and task force and implement any revisions in program policies or practices.

- Supervise or conduct all necessary record keeping.

- Conduct formative evaluations of the program in the school and make necessary midcourse adjustments, reporting any major problems to the program administrator.

- Implement summative data collection efforts prescribed by the program administrator.

- Do, in general, whatever is necessary to optimize the program's effects in the school.

The remainder of this booklet offers suggestions for ways to perform these tasks efficiently and effectively. Some additional references you may find useful to your role are as follows:

- Fullan, M. *The Role of Human Agents Internal to School Districts in Knowledge Utilization*. San Francisco: National Institute for Studies in Education and Far West Educational Laboratory, 1980.

- Fullan, M.; Miles, M.; and Taylor, G. "Organizational Development in Schools: The State of the Art." *Review of Educational Research* 50, No. 1 (1980): 121-183.

- Louis, K.S., and Rosenblum, S. *A Program and Its Implications for Dissemination and School Improvement Policy*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, 1981.

CREATIVE WAYS TO CARRY OUT YOUR PROGRAM COORDINATOR ROLE

Tailor the Model Program to Your School

Implementing a dropout prevention program in a school involves a great deal of thought and preparation. You must begin by fitting the program model to the needs and resources of your school. If the program model and procedures have been developed by your school system or if you are adapting a model developed elsewhere (e.g., Project COFFEE or Cities in Schools; see *The Helping Process Overview Guidebook* for reviews of these models), you have a somewhat different task than if the model you are going to use is one you developed specifically for your school.

If the model was developed elsewhere, you will need to determine which features are most appropriate and feasible for your school. A districtwide model may prescribe more components than your at-risk students really need. Alternatively, it may lack some features that are really crucial to the dropout-prone students in your particular school. Also the model may call for components for which your school lacks the staff or other resources to implement effectively.

Here are suggestions for how to carry out the responsibility of initial program implentation:

- **Assess the needs of your at-risk students.** You may do this formally or informally, but you need to know the specific range of needs of the at-risk students at **your** school. Before your administrator(s) developed the program model or decided to adopt an outside one, he or she should have performed this kind of needs assessment across the board. If the findings are broken down according to schools, you can probably use their data to examine the specific needs at your school. If such data are not available, you may be able to use some of the needs assessment methods

and/or instruments that the administrators used (see the **Helping Booklet for Administrators/Planners** for details).

- **Match the program model components to your school resources.** In essence, you need to know whether the components the model calls for (e.g., use of bilingual education, extra guidance support, cooperative education) are available or can be created in your school and community. Start by examining the model closely to determine just which components will be new to your school ("add-ons"). Then determine which of these the school system will support with extra staff or funding and which your school will be expected to create out of its current operating budget and the use of volunteers and/or donations.

- **Assess your communication needs.** Will you need to develop new lines of communication with outside agencies and groups? Will you need to establish or improve linkages with middle schools to ensure that necessary student data are transferred to your school (many students "disappear" from enrollments between middle school and high school!)? How can you avoid or minimize "turf" problems among participants by maximizing communications?

- **Develop an implementation plan.** Once you have your school needs assessment data in hand and have matched program components to available resources, you need to develop a plan for implemention. This plan should feature a task-by-task breakdown and schedule (with milestones to help evaluate progress) and should include the following events:

  —Reorganizing and/or revising existing school programs, courses, instructional support, schedules, and so forth to accommodate the dropout prevention program

  —Locating additional resources that may be needed for successful implementation

  —Publicizing the new program to faculty, staff, and students

  —Soliciting and selecting faculty and staff to participate in the program

—Soliciting and organizing the participation of outside professionals and volunteers and setting up linkages and communication networks with outside groups and other schools

—Providing necessary inservice and other training for participating faculty, staff, and outside professionals and volunteers

—Interviewing and selecting the initial group of at-risk students for program participation

—Facilitating initial helping process team meetings and development of students' Individualized Helping Plans (IHP)

—Overseeing the initial implementation of specific program components in the school

—Coordinating the initial implementation of specific program components delivered by outside agencies, organizations, or groups

—Overseeing the use of the helping process for implementing students' IHPs and assisting helping process team members in "ironing out the bugs" in the process

- **Negotiate for additional school-related resources and support.** You can use your school needs assessment data and implementation plan to make a case to administrators for supplying additional resources or support for the program in your school. It is entirely likely that some program components will require more effort or funding than the administrators anticipated. It is also possible that your school will have a special need that is not included in the overall program model. In addition, your faculty and staff may have greater needs for program-related staff development than the general program budget allows.

- **Develop your community outreach for additional external resources and support.** Don't expect the school system to supply everything. Even if the program administrator(s) make agreements with outside agencies and groups for the overall program,

it will be up to you to make local contacts and coordinate activities with groups in your area. You will also need to develop many of your own collaborations (e.g., with local employers, church groups, volunteers, and the like).

If you are responsible for setting up an alternative school, you should be aware that research on dropout prevention programs in such settings shows that the most effective schools have certain common characteristics. **These components are major "pluses" for any dropout prevention program in any setting:**

- Highly targeted services for a relatively homogenous school population
- Strong principals and/or program coordinators
- Small school size
- A high degree of program autonomy, in which the program has its own name and is operated by persons with the authority and responsibility to deal with problems in their own way
- Teachers who actively participate in counseling students as well as in management
- Student involvement in school governance and classroom activity
- Opportunities for "learning by doing"
- Strong reinforcement for student progress and achievement
- Cultivation of a "family atmosphere" in which students and and adults in the school work problems out together
- Clear standards, rules, and regulations
- Accommodations for the working student, the pregnant teenager, and the teenage parent

Publicize the Program in Your School and Community

Everyone in your school needs to know about and be somewhat familiar with the dropout prevention program you are about to implement. You'll need to generate enthusiasm and commitment among faculty and staff in order to solicit their participation in the program. (Depending on how your administration proposes to proceed with faculty/staff selection, asking them to participate in the program may follow selection by the program administrator(s) and/or the school principal).

Naturally, the attitude that all adults in the school take toward the program will affect its capacity to help students. You will need the support of nonparticipating faculty and staff to make referrals of at-risk students to the program, to offer perspective on the program's progress and effectiveness from professionals outside the process, to provide information to you and/or helping process teams about particular situations that may arise with individual students but not be noticed by team members, and to provide contacts outside the school for additional program resources. Publicity efforts for the program must thus address all staff and faculty, not only those you expect or hope will volunteer to participate directly.

You will also need to publicize the program to the students in your school. Your program may not be able to serve all of the dropout-prone students, but you may be able to motivate many of these youth to participate in some related activities (e.g., take vocational courses, ask for tutoring). To do so, you should (1) make them aware of what dropping out of school will mean for their futures in the long run and (2) make them aware of the options—both in the program and in the school and/or community—that they can access to help them succeed in school and earn a diploma.

Also, don't overlook the potential benefits of publicizing the dropout prevention program to your community. Many resources exist there, such as volunteers, cooperative or other employment for your at-risk students, donations of equipment or facilities, financial donations, and guest speakers or instructors from business and industry. Most communities respond positively and supportively to schools'

organized efforts to counteract the dropout problem, as citizens recognize that the many problems of dropouts inevitably affect the local economy, tax base, and safety.

Here are some suggestions for publicizing the program in your school and community:

- **Insert some introductory material about the program in school preservice and/or inservice sessions on other topics.** These training sessions are an opportunity for you to whet the interest of your faculty and staff in the program. If possible, "borrow" 20 minutes or so from the trainer or facilitator's program to present these brief introductory materials yourself.

- **Use all available in-house communication avenues** (e.g., a faculty-staff newspaper, bulletin boards, staff meetings, memoranda from the principal, and so forth) to inform faculty and staff about the program, solicit their input, and generate their enthusiasm for it.

- **Meet with individual faculty/staff or small groups to "talk up" the program informally,** in the faculty lounge, over lunch, and wherever and whenever the opportunity presents itself.

- **Initiate local publicity** or cooperate with publicity efforts at the school system level to get local media (e.g., neighborhood newspapers, radio stations, and so forth) to publicize how the program will work in the school system, and in your school in particular.

- **Encourage enthusiastic faculty and staff members to act as ambassadors for the program** to other school professionals, to in-school volunteers, to the students with whom they work, and with people and groups in the community with which they have contact.

- **Introduce and advertise a "Dropout Prevention Week" in your school and community.** Act as a speaker to community organizations and groups on the importance of student retention and the goals and needs of your dropout prevention program. Provide the local media with press releases and interviews to publicize the dropout problem and your school's efforts to counteract it. In

the school, organize a student assembly that focuses on the problem and uses entertaining and informative approaches to get the students' attention. One effective way is to ask a celebrity (local or visiting), such as a rock musician or rock radio DJ, to appear and talk about the importance of finishing high school. Another strategy is to ask young adults who have dropped out of school, had a hard time, returned to G.E.D. classes, and since become successfully employed to talk to the students about their experiences. In addition, video and other materials exist that you can use to make a point about finishing school. For example, the National Center for Research in Vocational Education developed a videocassette, intended primarily for use with students, to heighten students' awareness of factors that lead to dropping out of school and to help them make thoughtful choices. This videocassette can be used, with explanation, to acquaint other groups with the problem and ways to address it.

Select Participating Faculty and Staff

Once faculty and staff in your school are aware of and interested in the program, you should create a list of those who have indicated that they would like to participate. At this point, you may not need to do more than recommend to the program administrator which faculty and staff should be asked to participate. On the other hand, administration may leave faculty and staff selection to you.

Here are the kinds of qualities to look for when selecting instructors to participate in the program (many of these qualities apply equally to other adults in the school):

- An attitude toward curriculum as a means to an end rather than an end in itself
- Openness to restructuring traditional curriculum concepts to include relevancy-based, applied learning activities
- Little or no concern about personal "turf" in the school or fear of innovations that require a redefinition of their role

- Flexibility and originality in instructional approaches and openness to new ideas
- Willingness to examine preferred teaching modality in relation to students' needs.
- Ability to work well with other faculty and staff as team members
- Ability to function as a positive role model
- Willingness to take on the added responsibility and commitment of occasional personal time needed in working effectively with at-risk students
- Acceptance of variety in student types and lifestyles and resistance to judging students who adopt unusual modes of dress or speech that are common among many at-risk students
- A sense of humor

In the event that you do not get enough faculty and staff to volunteer to participate in the program, you will need to confer with your school principal and/or program administrator to develop an alternative strategy. One approach is to assign additional faculty and/or staff to the program, but this is not recommended; program effectiveness depends strongly on the willingness of participants to volunteer their efforts. Other options include hiring additional faculty and/or staff to fill needed roles, finding volunteers in the community to fill the roles, or reducing the initial number of students to be served in the hopes that when the program takes hold in the school it will generate acceptance and participation among more of the faculty and staff.

Provide Inservice on the Helping Process

Before actual program activities begin, you need to make sure that all adults participating in the program (including community volunteers and parents) understand the program model, how your school will implement it, and what other groups will be involved. They also need to understand their roles, responsibilities, and opportunities in the helping process. This information is critical for any program, and

especially for a program that will involve significant changes in school structure, policies, schedules, curricula, and the like.

The simplest way to provide this information and train the participants to use it effectively is to provide inservice training for all involved adults. An example of a 1-day inservice agenda might look like this:

Madison High School Inservice on the Franklin District Dropout Prevention Program

8 15 a m	Coffee and donuts
8 30 a m	Introductions and opening address by C J Prandle, Superintendent of Schools
9 00 a m	The Franklin School District Dropout Prevention Program (DDP) model
9 30 a m	How Madison School will implement its components of the DPP model
10 15 a m	Break (15 minutes)
10 30 a m	Presentations by DPP collaborators in the community • Dr Jane Monroe for County Health Services • Mr Alan Mitsuzo for County Welfare and Housing Aid • Mr Juan Gutierrez for Hispanic Volunteers of Franklin County • Ms Catherine Santini for Worthington Business Machines (cooperative education provider) • Dr Jutec Radislav for County Family Counseling Services • Ms Alice Francke for the Memorial Hospital Outpatient Substance Abuse Program
12 00 noon	Catered buffet lunch
1 15 p m	Overview of the Helping Process
2 00 p m	Small groups break out to discuss various Helping Process team member roles and responsibilities
3 15 p m	Break (15 minutes)
3 30 p m	Process skills training and discussion
4 15 p m	Concluding remarks and end of inservice

Of course, 1 day of inservice may not be sufficient to cover all important aspects of the model and the helping process. In addition, as the program becomes established and new persons come into it as participants, additional introduction and training sessions will be needed.

Research shows that close attention to staff development can make a major difference in the effectiveness of a dropout prevention program, because so much of any program's success depends on the training and retention of high-quality practitioners. For example, other skills or activities that may need further development among faculty and staff and other adult participants are such skills as working effectively with parents, counseling students, acting as an advocate or mediator for students, developing and updating an effective IHP, working effectively as a team, dealing with sensitive turf issues in the school, and so forth.

As program coordinator for your school, you will be the person responsible for providing (and very probably conducting a major portion of) inservice training. Be aware of training needs (including occasional clarification of roles, procedures, and the like) among the program participants. Periodic, even cyclical training will be needed (perhaps a refresher once a year—combined with introductory training for newcomers). Scheduling common meeting/conference times for key personnel and the coordinator provides daily contact for problem solving and continuing in-service. You may also want to consider giving a workshop to the students in the program, as well, to make them aware of the program options and to help them learn to make the best use of the program and helping process to meet their needs.

Organize and Modify School Programs and Courses

Existing programs, courses, and activities in the school should be reviewed to determine whether changes are needed in access, delivery, scheduling, content, and support to meet the needs of the students in the dropout prevention program. If modifications are needed, it is crucial that you **involve the school faculty and staff** who deliver that educational, guidance, recreational, or other support activity.

In many cases, your program model will prescribe that new services be added to those already existing in the school. (If you are in charge of an alternative school, you may find that most of the courses and other educational and support activities are new or take on new aspects in the alternative setting.) Again, involve affected faculty and staff in the development, adaptation, and/or implementation of the new activities.

Many dropout prevention programs use nontraditional curricula to serve students most effectively. These usually involve the following:

- An individualized instructional approach, particularly for teaching the basic skills
- Cooperative, experiential, or other work-education experiences that relate classroom learning to the real world and reinforce student independence
- Placement of students in coursework that starts at their own level, continues at their own pace, and provides the possibility of successful completion of a task on a daily basis.
- Use of "real-life" examples and problems whenever possible

Modifying existing courses and/or developing new curricula are time-consuming activities that require considerable expertise. If the program mandates that you undertake such activities in your school, be sure that you secure the support (financial as well as administrative) to hire persons with the necessary skills. If your instructors do the work, they should not be expected to do so on their own time. If outside consultants are hired, be sure that the actual school instructors have adequate input into the development or modification process, and that they are given the opportunity to review the draft curricula and recommend revisions. In the event of disagreements over content or pedagogy, you should act as mediator and, if necessary, make the final decision.

If new or altered in-school activities require the addition or modification of facilities and/or equipment, overseeing this work is also primarily your responsibility. Again, solicit the input of the instructors or other affected staff when planning remodeling or purchases.

Set Up and Maintain Open Lines of Communication

Clear and open lines of communication are critical to making the dropout prevention program work. Students, helping team members, parents (whether on a team or not), members of outside agencies and groups, your school principal, and other school faculty and staff all need to know who to talk to about what program-related concern. In addition, good communications can help defuse potential turf problems between individuals or organizations before they get out of hand.

One of your major roles is to serve as the central trunk for communications. Here are suggestions for carrying out your communications responsibilities:

- **Act as primary source of referral information** for brokering services for students in the program.

- **Serve as primary liaison with outside agencies and groups** involved in the dropout prevention program at your school.

- **Act as clearinghouse for general information about the program in your school** for all interested parties, including students, parents, school faculty and staff, the local media, potential volunteers or donors of resources, and so forth.

- **Clarify program policies and practices in your school for** helping process team members and others.

- **Serve as liaison for the program between your school and the overall program administration** (more details on this are given later).

- **Network with other schools,** especially middle schools, to ensure that information on students coming into your school is transferred and that students slated to enter your school don't "vanish" from enrollments (as frequently happens between middle school and high school in districts with a serious dropout problem).

- **Publish a monthly newsletter** distributed to students in the program, their parents, and others in the community, giving updates on the overall progress of the program, highlighting particular

program services or support activities, spotlighting especially effective helping process team members or successful at-risk students, and so forth (students can conduct interviews, write articles, do layout, and other tasks needed to publish and distribute the newsletter.

- **Make clear to all involved parties their responsibilities** as relayers and users of information.

- **Make clear to all involved parties the heirarchy of responsibility** and the channels of appeal to handle problems whose resolution requires the input or decisions of other participants (or nonparticipants).

Conduct or Supervise Student Intake

By this time, you should be ready to begin to select students to begin the program. Here are some suggestions for how to go about it:

- **Consult your program model and/or procedural manual or other top-level student intake policy.** It should define the population to be served and specify precise criteria for program eligibility. If no criteria are available, or they are not clear to you, your next action should be to seek specification and clarity.

- **Recognize (and make clear to other involved parties) that the program can't serve all the at-risk students in your school** (unless your are operating an alternative school for that precise purpose). Rarely are there enough resources to reach out to all who need help. Most dropout prevention programs try to help those students who seem most at-risk.

- **Perform or, if appropriate, delegate performance of the intake assessments** to a qualified guidance counselor or other faculty or staff member at the school. Intake assessments usually involve some aptitude testing, evaluation of grades and attendance records, assessment of school- and nonschool-related difficulties that put the student at risk, personal interviews with the student (and sometimes parents), and so forth. If you don't conduct the assessments yourself, it is still your responsibility to

supervise the assessments and to make sure that they are conducted fairly, according to the program criteria, and with as little stress on the student (and parents) as possible.

- **Use assessment information to select the students to admit to the program.** Even with exactly prescribed criteria and intake assessment procedures, you will still probably find yourself making some hard decisions. Keep in mind, though, that just because you must turn a student away from the dropout prevention program does not mean that you can't refer the student to other programs in the school or school system or to outside agencies or groups that might be able to help. **Don't use intake assessments to screen students out**—use them to steer students to the next-best services available for their needs.

- **Keep records of all intake decisions and record your reasons for accepting a student into the program or rejecting the student.** If you accept the student, you may also want to jot down some recommendations for components to include in the student's IHP; these notes will be helpful starting points for the student and his or her helping process team. If you must reject a student, make clear notes about your reasoning, refer to any relevant intake criteria, and record your recommendations for referral to other programs or services.

Select Students' Helping Process Team Members

As soon as you select the students to admit into the program, you should notify the student and begin the helping process. This involves selection of the people who will form each student's team. In identifying team members, try to maintain a balance of types of role models. Balance for age (parent figures) and sex provides students a variety of surrogates with whom to identify. Here are suggestions for how to go about it:

- **Consult your intake recommendations and determine the student's basic needs.** From this, you should be able to identify which of those needs are education-related and which are not.

- **Select appropriate school faculty and staff needed to create an initial helping process team** to meet the student's education-related needs. From this pool of adults, choose those whose involvement in the helping process will probably be crucial for this student. In making this selection, you may need to do a little detective work, but you should consider some of the following concerns:

  —Is the faculty or staff member overloaded with other responsibilities (e.g., teaching many courses, teaching many students, involved in one or several other helping process teams)?

  —Does the faculty or staff member have the specific skills and attitudes needed to meet this student's needs?

  —Does the faculty or staff member have a previous relationship with the student or the student's siblings or friends? Has this been positive or negative?

  —Will the faculty or staff member's personality mesh comfortably with this particular student's?

  —Will the faculty or staff member's personality or work style mesh comfortably with those of other helping process team members you may bring in?

- **Identify a mentor for the student,** if possible. A faculty or staff team member who is already a friend of the student is an ideal choice. If no such person exists, you may need to look outside of the school to an employer, older sibling (do not choose a parent), fellow church member, or other adult with a "significant other" relationship upon which to build. You may not be able to supply a mentor for a student immediately, however; one of the helping process team members may need to cultivate such a role as the helping process goes along.

- **Contact program liaisons for outside groups and agencies whose services may be needed by the student.** Work with each liaison to identify an appropriate person to serve on the student's helping process team. This will probably require you to share some of the

assessment findings with the liaison in order to help the liaison select a team member whose abilities and personality will be compatible with the student's and other team members'.

Facilitate Helping Process Teams' First Meetings

Begin by scheduling an initial meeting of the helping process team members, the student, and yourself. If possible, you should personally attend and facilitate the first meeting of each helping process team. If you cannot do so yourself, you should appoint an able and respected proxy for yourself, a person you have trained to fill this very important responsibility.

Here are some of the tasks and responsibilities you will need to address as facilitator of the first helping process team meeting:

- **Explain briefly to the student and team members the purpose of the helping process team and the team meetings.** Review, if appropriate, the general program model and the helping process.

- **Explain to the group why you have brought each of them into this team.** Everyone present needs to know why the others are present and what they can contribute to the student's progress.

- **Keep the meeting as informal as possible** to help the student and involved adults get to know and feel comfortable with each other. Do whatever is necessary to minimize any sense of threat in the student and to maximize the student's feelings of importance, acceptance, and equality in the group.

- **Don't expect the team to dive right into developing the student's individualized helping plan.** It may be more appropriate to discuss your general recommendations, explain why you brought these particular adult members together, and encourage open dialogue.

- **Act as advocate and main friend for the student** if no other adult present knows the student well enough to take those roles at the first meeting.

- **Share your recommendations for the student's IHP.** Make clear that development of the IHP should occur soon (perhaps at another meeting in the near future), and that the IHP prescription may change the composition of the helping process team from its initial membership.

- **Appoint, with the student's agreement, an appropriate adult member to serve as the team leader** for future meetings. Often, this person is the student's mentor, if he or she already has one. The team leader acts as coordinator for the student's IHP, facilitator at future team meetings, and your liaison with the group who keeps you apprised of progress and problems.

- **Charge the group, and especially the student, with finding an appropriate mentor for the student** if one has not already joined the team. A mentor is a vital member of a helping team, but because of the very personal nature of this surrogate parent role, it is not a responsibility that can simply be "assigned."

It is recommended that, if time permits, you also choose a random helping process team and become a team member for a student for a semester or two. There is nothing like "hands-on" experience to expand your awareness of the helping process!

Coordinate the Use of In-School Program Volunteers

Many dropout prevention programs make use of community volunteers to augment instructional assistance and other kinds of support for at-risk students. Volunteers may work as tutors, teacher aides, guest instructors or speakers, and the like. As a rich resource of nonschool experience, they bring important perspectives to their interactions with the students. They also bring a special kind of caring and credibility, because the students know that the volunteers are there because they choose to be, not because the work is part of paid employment.

As program coordinator, you will probably be the person who orients volunteers to the program, assigns them in the school, invites them to serve on helping process teams, and deals with any personal-

ity or other conflicts that may arise that involve them directly. You may or may not be involved in locating volunteers or in supervising their work.

Tutoring is one of the most important elements of almost any dropout prevention program, and the logical person to assign and coordinate the use of volunteer tutors is you, the program coordinator. In carrying out this task, you may find it useful to call in other adult(s) who are working with the student(s) in the subject area when orienting the volunteer. This will facilitate a good working relationship between the volunteer tutor and the other adult(s) who are trying to help the student absorb and learn to use the subject material.

Oversee the General Program Effort in the School

Overseeing the program in your school will probably consume most of your time as coordinator, once the program has been implemented. The majority of this work will involve normal supervisory and management responsibilities, such as making sure that program efforts are on task, on time, and within budget; keeping track of the overall progress of students through their IHPs; ensuring that helping process teams are working effectively; attending miscellaneous meetings to keep touch with developments at all levels; and dealing with day-to-day problems as they arise.

Some dropout prevention models place the services of local agencies directly into the school setting. These may include infant and child care for teenage parents, comprehensive health and family planning services, welfare and public housing services, family and/or substance abuse counseling, and the like. If such services are set up in your school, you will also need to oversee all aspects of the collaboration between those service providers and your school personnel and resources.

A very effective approach to managing a school's dropout prevention program is to introduce **participatory management.** This approach can save you a lot of time while cultivating a positive team spirit among all of the adults involved in the program. Many excellent texts exist that can help you develop the skills and make clear the concepts needed to

make participatory management work. One of its most critical elements, though, is to have participants (including students) meet regularly to discuss and create solutions to interim and ongoing problems (as is done through quality circles in many of the more progressive companies). Another is to delegate responsibility for decision making as much as possible (e.g., have the student and helping process team make as many of the decisions about the student's IHP as possible).

Regardless of what management style you use, remember to encourage creativity among all program participants as much as possible. **Creativity is the lifeblood of an effective dropout prevention program because it allows for individuality.** That is, it allows participants to develop program experiences around the needs of the students rather than trying to jam the students into inflexible, cookie-cutter program activities.

Serve as Liaison with Program Administration

Your program administrator and task force (if there is one) will probably call on you and any other program coordinators to attend occasional meetings and report on the progress of the program in the schools, discuss problems of general interest, share information about innovative practices, discuss the feasibility of additional program offerings, brainstorm on potential sources for additional funding and other needs, and recommend future action.

You are the liaison between your school and program administration. It's your responsibility to bring issues of concern in your school program to the attention of program administration. It is also your responsibility to carry back to your school and implement any revisions in program policies or practices that the program administration mandates.

Supervise or Conduct Record Keeping

You will need to set up a system to keep records on the program in your school, on all participating groups and individual adults (such as volunteers), on student IHPs and helping process team activities, on

students in the program, and so forth. Computerizing such record keeping from the start will probably save you considerable time and effort.

Your program administration may provide a record keeping system for you to use. If not, you may want to talk with other program coordinators (if any) in your system and collaborate to develop a common approach and formats. This will save everyone time later when called upon by program administration to produce data.

You should probably have the services of a clerical staff person to keep the records up to date. Alternatively, you could look for a responsible volunteer adult to perform the record keeping tasks for the program. Regardless of who inputs and updates records, however, it's important that you know how and where to access any and all program records, as well.

Collect and Use Formative Evaluation Data

Your program should have built into it some ways of sensing or measuring how the program is coming along at various points throughout each school year. This kind of evaluation is called formative evaluation because the data you collect are used to make midstream adjustments in program policies and practices in your school. Important information you may want to collect may include student achievement data, attendance data, verbal or written reports by helping teams, and/or verbal or survey feedback from students, parents, employers, and so forth. Surveys are usually useful ways of collecting formative data and, if they don't go over a few pages, are accepted and completed by most participants.

When you examine the patterns of the formative data, they should give you a good idea of how well the program is progressing. They should also help you pinpoint problem areas, and may—if you've been careful about how you've collected the information—suggest practical solutions to those problems.

For a newly implemented program, you may want to collect formative evaluation data quite frequently. For example, for the first year of a program, you may want to collect data after months 1, 2, and 3, and

then again after months 6 and 9 (data collected in month 12 or soon after will probably be more appropriate for summative evaluations—data on overall program outcomes for the year). You may not always want to collect the same kinds of data at each point, either.

For the most part, formative data is for your use only, to help you refine the program in your school. Your program administration may dictate how and when you conduct formative evaluations, however, and may require you to prepare reports based on the findings. If that is the case, don't ignore what the data can tell you about how to improve the program in your own school, however. Of course, if the data reveal a serious implementation, but rather with the model or with the program policies and practices. In such cases, your school is probably not the only one having the problem.

Collect Summative Data

Your program administration is responsible for prescribing what summative data you should collect. Usually, the administration will also provide the data collection instrument(s). You will probably be responsible for seeing that the instruments are used properly and that the data are collected in a timely and reliable manner.

You may also be called upon to use the summative data to develop a year-end report on the program in the school. If the administration provides an outline and format for the report, follow them carefully. Otherwise, here are some suggestions for preparing a year-end report:

- **Keep the report short and to the point.** Include figures and tables of data if they are important, but provide any large collection of data in an appendix.

- **Double-space the report for readability,** and use generous margins (e.g., 1 inch on both sides).

- **Use a straightforward, logical outline,** such as the following:

    1. Description of how the program has been implemented in your high school, in general, including all services and support offered, external collaborators involved, and so forth

2. Discussion of how many students you have served, services and support that have been provided for how many students, and other specific descriptors of the program in your school

3. Discussion of problems of your program and how you resolved them (this is where you can make a point about any ongoing difficulties for which you may need additional resources next year)

4. Description of student outcomes (e.g., how many students in the program completed the year with what grades, how many students dropped out of the program, how many of those dropped out of school, and so forth)

Do Whatever Is Necessary to Make It All Work

Many tasks and roles will probably emerge for you throughout the program that are not covered in this booklet. It would be impossible to anticipate them all. For the sake of your at-risk students, you will need to do whatever is necessary to optimize the program's effects in your school. **Never forget that it is young lives that may depend on YOU to make the difference.**

If you can impress this sense of responsibility and caring on the other adults in your program, your job will be halfway done. Because no matter how ambitious or elaborate a dropout prevention program may be—no matter how many or few resources it can call upon to offer to its students—the single, final factor that will make it work or let it fall on its face is the selfless, thoughtful caring of one or more adults in the program who resist taking the easy way out by saying, "Let somebody else do it."

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